

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Flattery Rocks, Copalis, and Quillayute Needles National Wildlife Refuges

March 2001 -Planning Update 2

Greetings!

This is the second update from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service intended to keep you informed about and involved with our Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Washington Islands National Wildlife Refuges.

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Destruction Island provides important breeding habitat for substantial populations of seabirds, such as tufted puffins and rhinoceros auklets. USFWS photo.

Thank You For Participating!

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Washington Islands National Wildlife Refuges, which includes Flattery Rocks, Copalis, and Quillayute Needles National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges). This plan will guide the management of the Refuges for the next 15 years. As part of this process, we have been gathering input from the public, Tribes, conservation and research organizations, and local, state, and federal government agencies. This planning update is to provide information on the status of the planning process and what we have heard from people so far.

In March 2000, the Service mailed approximately 150 copies of Planning Update 1 and several of you

returned comments with suggestions for managing the Refuges. Planning Update 1 described the CCP process, identified preliminary issues, and helped us expand our mailing list. Please let us know if you would like a copy of Planning Update 1.

This second update provides a revised schedule, summarizes the received comments, and lists the draft goals for the Refuges.

We would like to thank everyone who has commented on the CCP and invite you to continue sharing your ideas with us. Your participation continues to be critical to the success of this planning effort.

What were your concerns for the Refuges?

In response to the first Planning Update, some of you expressed your concerns and shared your visions for the Refuges. The following issues/opportunities were identified in comments submitted to us:

- Aircraft overflights
- Oil spills
- Recreational boating disturbance
- Marine invertebrate (shellfish) harvests
- Other wildlife disturbances
- Exotic species management
- Eco-tourism
- Interagency coordination of area management
- Law enforcement
- Research support

The Service planning team is using your comments to draft management objectives and strategies for public review.



Related to the puffin, the rhinoceros auklet nests in burrow chambers on grassy slopes. USFWS Photo.

Most of your comments expressed concern over the disturbance to Refuge wildlife caused by a number of potential sources. Low-flying aircraft disturbing seabirds and marine mammals was the number one mentioned issue. One respondent urged the Service “to work with FAA and other authorities to identify aircraft involved and address violations.” Impacts of recreational boating, military activities, eco-tourism, and near-shore fishing were also of concern. Suggestions for eliminating or reducing disturbance from recreational boating included banning jet skis, establishing 200-yard no-entry or seasonally-closed buffer zones around islands, and increasing education for boaters. Eco-tourism was considered disturbance by most respondents; however, a few people suggested an increase in responsible eco-tourism activities.

Oil spills were second in frequency with respondents noting their concern over oil spills and chronic oil pollution. A few people supported placement of a rescue tug at Neah Bay and “areas of avoidance” in the waters surrounding the Refuges.

Implied in many comments was the need for interagency coordination between adjoining land management agencies. One person stressed that the Service needs to have a stronger profile in dealing with other agencies and their actions that affect the Refuges. One suggestion encouraged non-intrusive research opportunities on the Refuges. Opportunities for investigations into invasive exotic species and marine invertebrate populations were also mentioned.

Who To Contact

If you have any questions or want to be added to our mailing list please contact us at:

Kevin Ryan, Project Leader
Washington Maritime NWR Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362
(360) 457-8451 (360) 457-9778 fax

Visit our Pacific Region Planning Website:
<http://www.r1.fws.gov/planning/plnhome.html>

What are the key issues for the Washington Islands NWRs?

The planning team and Service staff used input from the public, various organizations, other agencies, and affected Tribes to formulate the following issues that are the most significant to the Refuges. These issues will provide the basis for drafting management objectives and strategies for public review.



Double-crested cormorants nest in colonies, building tall nests of sticks and debris. USFWS photo

What can be done to increase public awareness of the Refuges and their wildlife resources?

The islands are one of the most recognized symbols of Washington State's coastline. However, in general, the public does not identify them as National Wildlife Refuges or adequately understand their importance as wildlife resources. The Service believes that opportunities exist to increase off-site interpretation

and education for the Refuges. Staff raised concern that current funding is not available for a permanent staff position to develop interpretive programs for the Washington Islands NWRs.

In what ways will the Refuges increase interagency/Tribal coordination?

There are many opportunities for conservation cooperation between the Refuges and neighboring Tribes, Federal, and State agencies, with whom they share marine resources. Issues that need to be addressed in the CCP include island clean up, use of Destruction Island, joint interpretive programs, trespassing restrictions and law enforcement, off-Refuge threats, tidal zone management, overflight disturbance avoidance, and cooperative conservation efforts.

What methods will be used to prevent disturbance to Refuge wildlife?

Refuge biologists, agencies, Tribes, conservation groups, and interested public have all brought attention to the serious issue of disturbance to sensitive seabirds and marine mammals. Disturbance comes from a variety of sources: access at low-tide, low-flying aircraft, and near-Refuge boating. The Service's primary goal for the NWRs is to minimize or eliminate disturbance to wildlife.

Vision Statement for the Washington Islands NWRs

Since 1907, critical nesting and breeding grounds for marine wildlife off the outer Olympic coast have been protected and preserved by the National Wildlife Refuge System. The more than 600 rocks, reefs, and islands known as Flattery Rocks, Copalis, and Quillayute Needles National Wildlife Refuges are designated wilderness (except Destruction Island), and all will continue to be preserved in a natural condition with minimal human intrusion. Management activities will focus on monitoring refuge wildlife and on protection and

maintenance of a natural functioning ecosystem. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service will coordinate with other agencies and Tribes to ensure the long-term health and viability of native seabird and marine wildlife populations. We will also work with others to provide wildlife viewing and interpretation at selected locations on the adjacent coastline. Fostering an appreciation for Pacific coast wildlife will enrich people in a variety of ways and ensure that this outstanding legacy of wildlife is passed on to future generations.

Key issues for the Washington Islands NWRs (cont.)

Are additional monitoring and research needed and how will they be managed?

Refuge staff voiced concern that funding remain stable for management-based research and monitoring. Refuge staff and a concerned citizen stated that only non-intrusive research be allowed within the sensitive seabird colonies. Staff agreed that promoting research findings should be a high priority.

What is the Refuges' role in reducing the risks of catastrophic events like oil spills?

Refuge staff, agencies, Tribes, conservation groups, and the public agree that the area is under significant threat from oil spills. It is within a heavy traffic area for ocean transport of oil and freight that can be treacherous because of severe weather and difficult navigation. The 1988 Nestucca and 1991 Tenya Maru oil and fuel spills killed more than 70,000 seabirds.

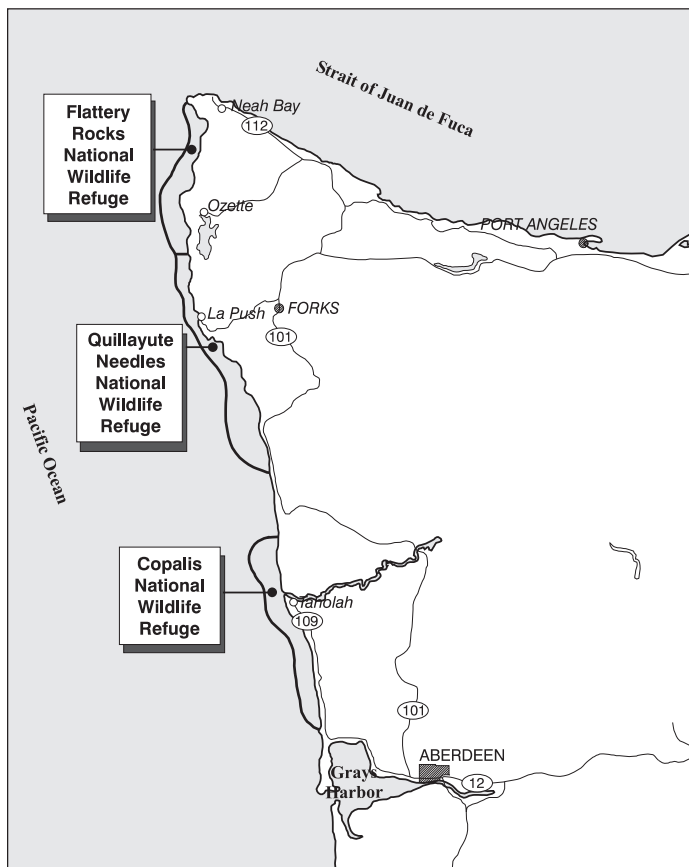
Efforts that reduce the risk of oil spills in the marine environment can include interagency planning to identify and reduce risks, "Area to Be Avoided" zones within the surrounding marine waters, and stationing of rescue tugs at Neah Bay.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of all Americans"

Will the Refuges cleanup human-caused contaminants and debris?

The inaccessibility of the islands makes removing contaminants and debris a difficult task. Refuge staff support continuing coordination with the U. S. Coast Guard to remove the remaining debris and contaminants from Destruction Island. It is unknown what debris might remain on islands used for military activities during WWII. Sea Lion Rock was used as a bombing target for military training until 1993. Marine debris, such as plastic litter and fishing gear, found on the Refuge tidelands is known to entangle seabirds and marine mammals. Refuge staff believe that it is hazardous to attempt removal of this debris in most cases. Refuge staff support interagency and Tribal educational efforts to reduce introduction of debris in the marine environment.



Washington Islands National Wildlife Refuges.

More than 600 rocks, reefs, and islands form the Flattery Rocks, Copalis, and Quillayute Needles National Wildlife Refuges. The Refuges provide significant protection for nearly 1-million coastal birds. They also provide habitat for 80% of Washington's breeding seabirds, such as the tufted puffin and rhinoceros auklet. Map created by EDAW.

Key issues for the Washington Islands NWRs (cont.)

Should the Refuges control invasive species?

Some people and environmental groups expressed concern over invasive, non-native plants and animals. Their comments call for research into the presence of invasive species and, where appropriate, control of species. The inaccessibility of the islands makes monitoring for invasive species extremely difficult. Refuge staff believe that monitoring should be a higher priority after events, such as strandings by ships known to have rodent infestations. In the past, Refuge management has attempted to control the population of introduced European rabbits on Destruction Island. Refuge staff are uncertain if the rabbits are causing a decline in seabird nesting success. They are concerned that elimination efforts could potentially be more detrimental to nesting seabirds than the habitat degradation from the rabbits.

Should new islands be added to the Refuges?

New islands are formed by headland areas being eroded by wave action. The Refuge mandate is the conservation of Olympic Peninsula off-shore islands. A protocol for assessing the value of those islands for inclusion into the National Wildlife System needs to be addressed.



Birds of the rocky shore, the black oystercatcher lays its eggs just above the high tide mark. USFWS photo

Refuge goals for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan

We have drafted six goals for the Washington Island Refuges. Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for the future management of the Refuges. They are based on the purpose of the Refuges, the mission and policies of the Refuge System, input received through this planning process, and the key issues identified as most significant to the Refuges. We are in the process of writing objectives and strategies, which will be made available for public review and comment when we release the draft CCP/EA in summer 2001.

- Goal 1) Protect migratory birds and other native wildlife and their associated habitats, with special emphasis on seabirds.
- Goal 2) Protect and manage the Washington Islands Wilderness Area to maintain its wilderness character and values.
- Goal 3) Protect and support the recovery of federally threatened and endangered species (TES) and Washington State special status species and their habitats.
- Goal 4) Promote effective coordination and cooperation with others for the conservation of Refuge resources with special emphasis on government agencies and Tribes with adjoining ownership or jurisdiction.
- Goal 5) Continue and enhance long-term monitoring and sustain applied scientific research.
- Goal 6) Increase public interpretation and awareness programs to enhance appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of Refuge resources.

The Planning Schedule*

Planning Update 1	Completed
Mail-In Response Form Due	Completed
Second Planning Update	March 2001
Third Planning Update	Summer 2001
Public Review of Draft CCP/EA	Summer 2001
Fourth and Final Planning Update	Fall 2001
Final EA, CCP, and Notice of Decision.....	Fall 2001

*An additional Planning Update has been added to the schedule and the release date of the final documents extended to Fall 2001. We will keep you posted of any major planning dates change.

What's Next?

The draft CCP/EA will be available for public review and comment this summer. It will provide you with an opportunity for input into the decisions being made to manage the Refuges over the next 15 years. A third planning update is scheduled just prior to release of the draft CCP/EA. It will provide highlights and give information on receiving the draft CCP/EA.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Maritime
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
33 S. Barr Road
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Address correction requested